



activism, analysis, agency

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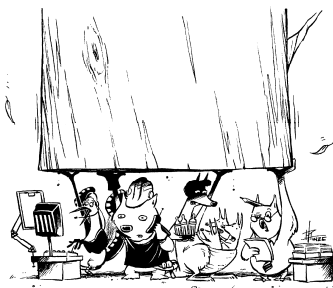
abstract

At the core of social movements are distinctive collective behaviours—direct action such as demonstrations, meetings, strikes, marches, picket lines—that repeatedly mobilise large numbers of people in efforts to change the world. Radicals, as opposed to liberals, regard the activism of these kinds of struggles as crucial for fundamental social change, which can only come from below. The capitalist state is the main obstacle to the ultimate success of challenges to exploitation as well as racial, gender and other oppressions, all grounded in class relations. Marxists identify the working class as the only social agent with the capacity to destroy that obstacle. They seek to link social movements that challenge aspects of the capitalist order with each other and particularly with the workers' movement. This project requires a kind of organisation distinct from movements and also from parties and associations whose focus is on conventional politics. Such a party of activists, whose purpose is to intervene in and build social struggles does not currently exist in Australia, but steps towards building it can be taken today.

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activism

Social movements are responses to concrete, practical problems. In Australia recently such problems have ranged from wages, conditions and rights at work, through the treatment of ‘gender groups’ (notably women, gays and lesbians), ‘racial’ and national groups (especially Indigenous people and, more recently, Muslims and Arabs) at home and abroad, foreign policy and wars, and the destruction of ecological systems.

Through social movements, people repeatedly mobilise together to bring about social change. Social movements are therefore inherently *political*—directed towards changing society by influencing public attitudes and/or public policy—and activist. At their core are distinctive collective behaviours: direct action such as demonstrations, meetings, strikes, marches, picket lines. As Barker et al point out, they are ‘effective insofar as they can mobilise adherents into shared activity’.¹ Their level of institutionalisation ranges from trade unions with significant numbers of full-time officials and assets to ad hoc groups sustained by the energy of a few people and scrounged resources. Nevertheless, an emphasis on these collective and potentially mass activities distinguishes social movements from the parliamentary politics, petitioning, lobbying, litigation, letter-writing, social work and donations of electorally focussed parties, lobby groups, charities and many other ‘non-government organisations’. Such behaviours and organisations often, however, form part of the penumbra of social movements. The balance between distinctive mobilising and other activities varies from movement to movement and over time.

Movements’ ranges of concerns also vary. Some have addressed a single issue: stopping the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, decent treatment of refugees, women’s access to abortion, support for East Timor’s independence struggle. Others have taken up a wider array of questions. This has been true of the Australian trade union movement, sections of which, while devoting most of their energies to the wages and conditions of their members, have always engaged with broader issues: solidarity with national liberation movements (in Indonesia, Vietnam), the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the oppression of women, gays, lesbians and Aborigines (at work and in society at large). The anti-capitalist movement from the Seattle protest in 1999 through the demonstrations against the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Melbourne in 2000, to their echo at the Sydney APEC leaders’ meeting in September 2007, raised economic, social and environmental demands, while many participants saw these as consequences of global capitalism as a system.

analysis

Within social movements there are different views about the causes of the problems they try to address—what Melucci calls ‘the plurality of perspectives, meanings and relationships which crystallize in any given collective action’². Following Ollman, we can identify two broad approaches on the left.³ These are frequently associated with preferences for forms of action to

Cover illustrations by David Pope in Rick Kuhn (ed.) *Class and struggle in Australia* Pearson, Frenchs Forest 2005 pp. 21, 55.

- 1 Sidney Tarrow *Power in movement: social movements and contentious politics* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 4-5; Colin Barker, Alan Johnson and Michael Lavalette ‘Leadership matters: an introduction’ in Barker, Johnson and Lavalette (eds) *Leadership and social movements*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2001, p.5.
- 2 Alberto Melucci *Nomads of the present: social movements and individual needs in contemporary society* Hutchinson Radius, London, 1989, cited in Verity Burgmann *Power, profit and protest: Australian social movements and globalization* Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2003, p.6.
- 3 ‘Liberals are people who recognize most of our social problems and truly want to do something about them. They view these problems as existing separate from each other and believe they can be dealt with one at a time... Recognizing that our major social problems are interconnected and can only be solved together is the insight that

bring about change, understandings of the state, the agents of social change, appropriate forms of organisation, and the kind of society which can resolve social problems. In other words, movements are typically forums for theoretical debate.⁴

While wanting to solve specific problems, **liberals** understand each of them and its solution in isolation from other issues. Found on a wide political spectrum that extends from the Coalition parties and beyond on the right, to Labor and the Greens on the left, liberals often see inadvertent mistakes by the responsible authorities as the cause of problems.⁵

Liberals tend to accept the conservative common sense⁶ that we live in a basically democratic society in which each individual citizen has a comparable, if not equal, capacity to shape public policy (through our vote), that reasoned argument can prevail in liberal democracies, that our rights and well-being are protected by the 'rule of law'. Liberalism therefore involves not just a particular analysis of the cause of the problems that social movements seek to address, but also an understanding of how to deal with them. These notions bolster activism that has faith in the use of official channels to resolve problems. They also justify piecemeal policy change. All the parties currently in Australian parliaments (whatever the differences in their material/class constitutions and platforms) and organisations such as GetUp, Greenpeace or Amnesty International, are liberal in this sense.

The individualism of common sense is grounded in the fetishism of commodities, the religion of mainstream economists, which holds that individual decisions, aggregated into supply and demand in different markets, govern the economy. In politics, individualism can take the form not only of faith in the myth of the sovereignty of citizens in liberal democracies. It also underpins beliefs that stunts or even terrorism can be effective means for achieving social change. The strategy of an 'exclusivist leadership' relies on 'committed action by an inner circle of activists, as distinct from wider movement circles... [who are] expected to accept core groups' decisions and to play more passive support roles as providers of material resources and/or admiration'.⁷

In both cases, individualism conceals an elitist conception of politics, where heroes have to act on behalf ordinary people, incapable of realising their own interests. On the one hand, the heroes are politicians: champions who combat injustice in the rather luxurious battlefields of parliaments. On the other they are the self-selected few who risk their bodies to engage in the 'propaganda of the deed'.

Unwillingness by decision makers to recognise and correct their errors may prompt liberals to participate in the direct political actions of social movements to supplement the conventional activities of lobbying, letter and submission writing, and engagement with parliamentary elections.

turns liberals into radicals... And solving these problems together means getting rid of the social system, capitalism, that gives rise to most of them. By explaining how this system came about and how it functions, Marxism fills out this radical insight and helps us develop a strategy for fundamental change', Bertell Ollman *How to take an exam and remake the world* Black Rose, Montréal 2001, the passage is also at www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/docs/h2_selections.php#musical, accessed 5 September 2007.

4 Barker *Leadership and social movements*, pp. 5, 6.

5 Another form of this explanation is the assumption that it is mass apathy, rather than any systemic problem, that is responsible for the state of the world. See, for example, the 1997 Australian volume, *I protest! Fighting for your rights: a practical guide*, cited in Burgmann *Power, profit and protest*, p. 12.

6 See Antonio Gramsci *Selections from the prison notebooks* International Publishers, New York 1971, pp. 5-14, 169-170, 234-239, 333, 423-424.

7 Barker *Leadership and social movements*, p. 21. Greenpeace typifies this outlook. Its analysis of environmental problems (as opposed to occasional agitation about them) is undertaken in isolation from other social issues, and its solutions are premised on modifications of the established order. Its methods also mirror the elitist common sense of mainstream politics. Greenpeace supporters contribute money and are not involved in the organisation's undemocratic decision-making processes, which are those of a transnational corporation. Instead of relying on the parliamentary elite of elected politicians to bring about change, Greenpeace urges us to put faith in its appointed specialists in media stunts and negotiations with politicians and corporate managers.

Even then, common sense ideas lead many single-issue activists, who are committed to radical social movement action in one area, to leave other problems to parliamentary parties or other movements, understood as pursuing unconnected goals.

Radicals identify not separate accidents or mistakes but a pattern of false decisions, priorities and values behind different social issues. Problems are systemic and only changes in fundamental social structures can, ultimately, solve them

Radicals tend to favour the militant, mass actions typical of social movements as the way to transform the world. It is, however, possible to reject the existing order while arguing either that its own institutions are the most effective means for bringing about change (as parliamentary socialists in the Labor Party once did) or that the actions of a different, extra-parliamentary elite will bring about change.

For Marxist radicals, the system that gives rise to social problems is capitalism. Problems arise from the fundamental features of capitalism: producing commodities and profits through the exploitation of workers; competition amongst capitals both in Australia and globally; and the efforts of the capitalist class to maintain its power. Marxists are not dazzled by the glitter of commodities whose exchange on markets seems to be what economics is all about. Behind the commodity, as a form taken by the things we need to survive, they see capitalist power relations, crucially the ownership and control of productive resources.

Consequently workers, who create social wealth, have to sell their capacity to work (labour power) to employers who then own the products of the labour and the value embodied in them. Profits, and hence capital accumulation and economic growth, are based on the exploitation of wage labour. Marxists regard radical *mass* struggles as the only way to solve systemic problems, because real liberation can only take the form of self-emancipation and cannot be handed down from above.

In addition, Marxists identify the state not as a means but as the main obstacle to changing, let alone overturning, the current social order. Common sense mistakes the impressive facades of parliaments for the totality of the state whose core is armed forces, police, judiciaries, public services. The senior officials of the state are members of the capitalist class and for many of them this status is congenital. The state attempts to promote capital accumulation and maintain conditions under which it can occur, most fundamentally the capitalist class's control over the vast bulk of society's productive resources.⁸

In order to survive in competition with domestic and international rivals, individual capitals seek to maximise their rates of profit by getting as much work as they can from the labour power they purchase, while keeping down their outlays on their employees' wages and other conditions. The state facilitates this process. The capitalist logic of exploitation is therefore not simply a matter of narrow economics but of class. Despite differences in the specific mechanisms involved, that logic also explains various forms of oppression, and the destruction of vital ecological systems.⁹

Unlike most social movement theorists, Marxists do not see multiple oppressions arising from multiple structural causes.¹⁰ Instead, Marx's emphasis on the centrality of class relations makes

8 Rick Kuhn 'Illusions of equality: the capitalist state' in Rick Kuhn (ed.) *Class and struggle in Australia* Pearson, Frenchs Forest 2005, pp. 39-54.

9 For discussions of the oppression of women, gays, lesbians, Aborigines and immigrant groups in Australia see Sandra Bloodworth 'Women, class and oppression', Rachel Morgain 'Sexual liberation: fighting lesbian and gay oppression', Mick Armstrong 'Aborigines: problems of race and class' and Phil Griffiths 'Racism: whitewashing the class divide' in Kuhn *Class and struggle in Australia*, pp. 107-176. On the ecological approach of Marx and Engels to environmental questions see Paul Burkett, *Marx and nature: a red and green perspective*, St Martins New York 1999; John Bellamy Foster *Marx's ecology: materialism and nature* Monthly Review Press, New York 2000; and, more accessibly Liz Ross *How capitalism is costing us the earth* Socialist Alternative, Melbourne 2007.

10 By contrast, in an analysis that was very influential in some social movements, Laclau and Mouffe regard each different form of oppression as separate from each other and from society generally, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal

fighting oppression a priority, as a pre-condition for working class unity. This approach does not imply that oppressions such as racism are 'unimportant'. Its point is that the relationship between class and oppression is causal: oppression arises from class relations and undermines the collective interests of the working class.¹¹

agency

This analysis has important implications for the means we should use to resist all forms of oppression, as well as exploitation. Only one of the diverse groups adversely affected by capitalism has the capacity to fundamentally challenge the power of the capitalist class and its chief bulwark, the state. Workers create social wealth; they are trained to cooperate under the supervision of capital and also, in order to survive, in opposition to capital's efforts to push down wages and conditions. The divisions promoted by oppression undermine the working class's capacity for collective struggle. The biological conditions for existence of humanity are, of course, also those of workers. The working class therefore has an objective interest in fighting exploitation, oppression and ecological destruction and it has the potential power to overturn capitalism and replace it with society in which humanity consciously and collectively manages the world in its own interests.

The strength of the union movement obviously depends on the working class's self-awareness and self-confidence. But the capacity for other movements to achieve their goals is also dramatically increased by the example of workers' struggles and the involvement of workers, given their particular social leverage. It is therefore no coincidence that the last major surge in generalised industrial struggle, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, also coincided and intersected with the emergence and successes of the movement against the Vietnam war, the women's and gay liberation movements, a militant phase in the movement against the oppression of Indigenous people and for land rights, and campaigns to conserve natural and significant built environments (in which the Builders Labourers Federation played a vital role).¹² On the other hand, a 'painful discovery of American new left movements during the 1960s was that students alone lacked the power to change society, regardless of their commitment'.¹³

Marxists add the fundamental strategic significance of the working class to the radical insight that mass action is both a means to achieve and a precondition for profound social change, and that solidarity amongst progressive social movements improves their chances of success both in their separate goals and the common struggle against the existing order. But how are we to get from where we are today to systemic change?

Since the 1970s social movements have declined. There are currently no social movements in existence in Australia apart from the trade union movement. Even there, trade union density and the number of strike days per thousand employees are at their lowest levels since statistical collections began in 1912 and 1913.¹⁴ But, particularly since the early 1990s, there have been a series of dramatic but short-lived upsurges in struggle which indicate the potential for change from below. The campaign against the government of Victorian Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett in 1992 saw a series of strikes, pickets and protests which reached their peak in a strike by 800,000 workers and a

Mouffe *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics* Verso, London 1985, pp. 180-191. This approach 'seeks to refute the unifying potential of working class interests', Sharon Smith *Subterranean fire: a history of working-class radicalism in the United States* Haymarket Books, Chicago 2006, p.43.

11 Smith *Subterranean fire*, pp. 43-45.

12 Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann *Green bans, red union: environmental activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation* UNSW Press, Sydney 1998.

13 Barker *Leadership and social movements*, p. 15.

14 L. J. Perry 'A long-term perspective on industrial disputes in Australia: 1913-2003' *Economic Papers* September 2005 24 (3), p. 267; Australian Bureau of Statistics *Industrial disputes, Australia* 6321.0.55.001, Table 2b, 2007; Australian Bureau of Statistics *Year book Australia 2001*, 1301.0, 2001 p. 245; Australian Bureau of Statistics *Employee earnings, benefits and trade union membership, Australia - trade union membership* 63100TS0001, 2007.

150,000 strong march on 10 November 1992. There was extensive picketing by thousands of unionists and others in the course of the 1998 waterfront dispute. The militant attempt to blockade the Melbourne WEF in September 2000 involved 20,000 protesters. Between half and a million marchers took to the streets of Australia to prevent Australian involvement in the invasion of Iraq on 14-16 February 2003. In 2005 and 2006 the ACTU organised the largest union rallies in Australian history against the Howard Government's WorkChoices legislation. There were also large demonstrations against Australian involvement in the 1991 Gulf War and 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, while hundreds of thousands marched for Aboriginal rights in June 2000. Over 15,000 people protested against the visit of George Bush to the 2007 APEC conference in Sydney despite unprecedented levels of policing and other intimidation.

Several features of these large mobilisations are significant. Sections of the union movement have often played a role in supporting such struggles, to whose organisation small political groups made a contribution out of proportion to their size. The upsurges have been episodic, with few cumulative gains in the size of successive movements or in the number of activists who have organised the campaigns and protests.

Even when workers are involved as individuals rather than as unionists, they make up a large proportion of those mobilised by other social movements or campaigns. Unions were obviously at the centre of the waterfront dispute and the campaign against Kennett's industrial legislation and WorkChoices. They also provided support for the mobilisation against Kennett's cuts, the WEF and APEC, the anti-war movements and struggles of Indigenous Australians.

The weight of the working class in such arenas has, however, been limited by the decline in the trade union movement and workers' self-confidence to fight for their own wages and conditions, and the timidity of union officialdom. This was particularly clear after the 'riot' at parliament house in Canberra on 19 August 1996, when union leaders turned the protest campaign over the new Coalition Government's early cutbacks and proposed industrial relations legislation into a defeat.¹⁵

The working class has played a vital role in social movements in Australia and is the key to radical change from below. Political groups (conventional parties and particularly organisations with an emphasis on extra-parliamentary activity) have, however, also played a vital role and have a different kind of strategic significance. From the 19th century, socialists have been deeply engaged with workers' and trade union movements, as well as women's, gay, anti-racist, anti-imperialist and anti-war movements. Socialists were at the centre of workers' and other movements during the last period of generalised social struggles during the late 1960s and 1970s. In the unions the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), often in alliance with leftwing members of the ALP, and in a few unions its splinters, the Chinese-line Communist Party of Australia (Marxist Leninist) and Russian-line Socialist Party of Australia, were strong.¹⁶ The Labor left, personified by Jim Cairns and Tom Uren, was crucial in building the massive Moratorium movement of 1970, in which the Communist Party, particularly through its union officials, was also influential. Trotskyists in the Labor Party, around

15 See Luke Deer 'The Parliament House riot of 1996', www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/interventions/, accessed 16 September 2007, based on Luke Deer 'The Parliament House riot of 1996' Political Science honours thesis, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Australian National University 1998. Also see Tom Bramble 'War on the waterfront: the MUA dispute' www.takver.com/wharfie/wotw.htm, accessed 12 April 2008, originally published by Brisbane Defend Our Unions Committee 1998.

16 See Alastair Davidson *The Communist Party of Australia: a short history* Hoover Institution, Stanford 1969; Tom O'Lincoln *Into the mainstream: the decline of Australian Communism* Stained Wattle, Westgate 1985. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, members of the International Socialists (IS, an unorthodox Trotskyist group whose descendent is Socialist Alternative) were at the core of rank and file groups in the Administrative and Clerical Officers Association in several cities. The authors were involved in these groups in Sydney and Canberra and Rick edited their (short-lived) newspaper.

Bob Gould, were a leading element in the early anti-war movement in Sydney from 1965.¹⁷ CPA members and Trotskyists were prominent in the women's and gay liberation movements.¹⁸

The shift to the right of the Labor Party and Labor left over the past three decades has seen a decline in their engagement with social movements (apart from the union movement). Some politicians spoke at anti-war rallies in 2002 and 2003, but neither the machine of the Party nor its left factions consistently built them.

The Labor Party contains no revolutionary current and for good reason. Always committed to the management of Australian capitalism, the Party's historically distinctive relationship with the working class—in terms of its electoral base, individual membership and trade union affiliation—has become increasingly attenuated since World War II. Its policies are more right wing today on industrial relations (and many other issues) than ever before, while its left factions are more alternative routes to desirable posts than advocates of (even parliamentary) socialist views.

The Greens are certainly well to the left of the Labor Party. They are currently the only parliamentary opposition to neo-liberalism and are prepared to endorse and occasionally build extra-parliamentary mobilisations. The anti-war demonstrations in early 2003 were a highpoint in Greens' extra-parliamentary activity and led to rapid gains in their membership and vote.¹⁹ But they are not an anti-capitalist organisation, lack a class analysis and do not identify the working class as the agent for achieving social change: their strategy is fundamentally parliamentary. The German Greens shared these characteristics, along with the nationalism of the Greens in Australia, and evolved into a neo-liberal, pro-war party of the status quo.²⁰

So, while parliamentary parties such as the ALP and the Greens have at times played a major role in building some social movements, their involvement has been ambiguous, also reinforcing common sense ideas about politics and elections. Even as they address mass protests and lead marches, one

17 See Rick Kuhn 'The Australian left, nationalism and the Vietnam War'

www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/interventions/lvframe.htm, accessed 16 September 2007, originally published in *Labour History* 72, May 1997, pp. 163-184.

18 There are no studies of the women's and gay liberation movements in Australia that systematically document the influence of the organised left. The following, far from exhaustive or systematic list of people who were or became members of far left organisations while they were prominent in the movements is, nevertheless, indicative. In the gay liberation movement, Craig Johnson in Sydney and Phil Carswell in Melbourne were Communists; Ken Howard, Steve Oram, Ruth Egg, Liz Ross in Melbourne, Brett Trennery and Ken Davis in Sydney were members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP, then a Trotskyist group, now the Democratic Socialist Platform); and in the International Socialists (from which today's Socialist Alternative descended) Di Minnis in Melbourne and later Sydney. There were very early links between the women's liberation movement and Resistance (a forerunner of the SWP) in Sydney, Eva Cheng 'Vietnam and the women's liberation movement', an interview with Sandra Hawker and Helen Jarvis, *Green left weekly* 26 April 1995, <http://www.greenleft.org.au/1995/184/12210>, accessed 18 September 2007. CPA members involved in the movement included Joyce Stevens, Mavis Robertson in Sydney, Daphne Gollan in Canberra and Carmel Shute in Brisbane and Melbourne; Janey Stone in Melbourne and Carole Ferrier in Brisbane were in the IS.

The literature on this aspect of other movements and campaigns from the mid 1970s to the present is even sparser. Since 1970, however, we have observed, as participants, the serious and sometimes very influential involvement of socialist groups in many student movements and campaigns; the movement against uranium mining, in the late 1970s; campaigns for the right to choose, Palestine solidarity, refugee rights and anti-racist activity; and anti-war movements (in the early 1980s, against Australian involvement in the wars against Iraq in 1990-1991 and the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq 2002-2003).

19 On Greens membership see 'The Green swathe' *Canberra times* 29 March 2003 p. 12; Monica Videnieks 'Greens' Siewert launches push for Senate' *The West Australian* 23 February 2004; Michael Bachelard, Bernard Lane 'Greens lose the Wilderness vote - Election 2004' *Australian* 2 October 2004 p. 10.

20 For the neo-liberal labour market and welfare policies of the Red-Green coalition in Germany see Wolfgang Streeck and Christine Trampusch 'Economic reform and the political economy of the German welfare state' *German politics* 14 (2) June 2005, pp. 174-195. For changes in 'defence policy' under the coalition see Fabian Breuer 'Between ambitions and financial constraints: the reform of the German armed forces' *German politics* 15 (2) June 2006, 206-220.

of their loudest messages, always at least implicit, frequently stated quite bluntly, has been ‘vote for us’. For them, direct, collective action is not the fundamental means for transforming society but merely a supplement to an essentially parliamentary strategy. The commitment of these parties to parliamentary politics entails acceptance of the capitalist state as the framework for political change. Consequently, their outlooks are nationalist and their conceptions of democracy and, when the Labor left still talked about it, socialism have been very limited, excluding workers’ power at all levels of society. The Greens’ policies assume the validity of Australian national interests, rather than class interests.²¹

The level of practical control over parliamentarians by the extra-parliamentary Labor Party, let alone its rank and file, has been limited for many decades and in decline for a considerable period. In the case of the Greens, even the requirement that politicians act in accord with party policy is tokenistic.²²

At present social movements are not robust and the working class is, to use György Lukács’s terminology, mainly ‘an object of history, created by the process of capital accumulation.’²³ Yet, through the experience of class struggles it can become ‘the subject of history’, conscious of its interest in socialist revolution.

Struggles for reforms can not only bring about partial and temporary solutions to specific social problems, but also develop into a movement to get rid of capitalism and the capitalist state. While the ruling ideas are those of the ruling class,²⁴ workers are not mere dupes. Consciousness is a dynamic rather than a static phenomenon. As Sharon Smith argues, the impact of class struggle, ‘in which workers’ objective class interests collide with “the ideas of the ruling class”’, on consciousness is ‘central to Marxist theory’.²⁵

If the working class is to emancipate itself, a different kind of party is necessary. To sustain a fundamentally extra-parliamentary orientation, a party of this kind needs to have consistent revolutionary politics and to adhere to a theory of society, not just a shopping list of policies. The purpose of such an organisation is not electoral success but to coordinate its members’ activities and to apply the experience of past socialists, synthesised in Marxist theory, to the analysis of contemporary society in order to promote the self-emancipation of the working class. Its success depends on its capacity to reciprocally build itself, as a revolutionary organisation, and social struggles. A mass working class party like this can function as an *organisational accumulator* that sustains existing activists between campaigns and movements, synthesising and theorising their experience and knowledge.

21 Greens Senator Bob Brown, for example, in arguing against involvement in Iraq said that Australian troops had more of a role to play in the ‘neighbourhood’ and endorsed the intervention into the Solomon Islands in 2003 - Australian Associated Press ‘Troop pledge for Solomons welcome, but long overdue—Greens’ 26 June 2003. This was not an aberration: ‘Our troops should be in Australia and our neighbourhood’, Bob Brown ‘Greens oppose Afghanistan build-up’ media release 10 January 2006, http://www.bobbrown.org.au/600_media_sub.php?deptItemID=1872, accessed 20 September 2007; also “‘Leave Iraq’ call as warships head for East Timor’ media release 13 May 2006 http://www.bobbrown.org.au/600_media_sub.php?deptItemID=1994, accessed 17 September 2007.

22 Australian Greens ‘The charter and national constitution of the Australian Greens’ October 2006, especially clause 41.2, p. 24, <http://greens.org.au/library/about/constitution.pdf>, accessed 17 September 2007.

23 Georg Lukács *History and class consciousness* Merlin, London 1971 [1923], pp. 2–3, 8, 149 et seq. John Rees provides a valuable and accessible account of Lukács’s contribution, *The algebra of revolution: the dialectic and the classical Marxist tradition* Routledge, London 1998, pp. 202–61.

24 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels *Manifesto of the communist party* originally published 1848, www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html, accessed 12 September 2007. Also see their discussion, which begins ‘The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas’ in *The German ideology*, 1845–46, first published 1932 www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm, accessed 12 September 2007.

25 Smith *Subterranean fire*, p.46.

These arguments are not new.²⁶ They were outlined and put into practice by Marx and Engels in the *Communist manifesto* and the revolution of 1848-1849 in Germany. Bolsheviks and Communists developed them further in their activities between 1903 and the early 1920s. Hence Lenin's conception of the party member:

In a word, every trade union secretary [the archetype of the social movement activist or employee] conducts and helps to conduct 'the economic struggle against the employers and the government'. It cannot be too strongly maintained that this is still not Social-Democracy [i.e. Marxism], that the Social-Democrat's [Marxist's] ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth before all his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for all and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.²⁷

But such a party is also crucial in the process of revolution itself. For the working class has to overturn the power of the established order, especially the police and military forces, centralised in the state. Coordinated action is therefore decisive for the success of the revolution. The revolutionary party's capacity for taking rapid initiatives and the skills of its membership in arguing for and persuading others about the measures necessary therefore makes it indispensable.

There is no revolutionary party in Australia.²⁸ Socialist organisations are currently smaller than they have been for over a century. In the past, however, small socialist propaganda groups have, in countries such as Russia, Poland, China and France,²⁹ formed the basis for revolutionary parties committed to mass political action—the forms of activity typical of social movements—because they identified the working class as the key agent of social change. By functioning as an organisational accumulator of activists, experience, theory and fresh analysis, on a tiny scale, a propaganda group in Australia today can also lay the foundations for a socialist workers' party with the potential to build and lead struggles for the overthrow of the capitalist social order that all progressive social movements resist.

26 For the lineage of the case for a revolutionary socialist party and a more systematic exposition, see Chris Harman *Party and class* www.marxists.de/party/harman/partyclass.htm, accessed 23 September 2007, originally published in *International socialism* 35, Winter 1968-1869; and John Molyneux *Marxism and the Party* Haymarket, Chicago 2003. Tony Cliff's multi-volume *Lenin* explores Lenin's ideas in their original context, Bookmarks, London 1975-1979. Also see Georg Lukács *Lenin: a study in the unity of his thought* New Left Books, London 1977.

27 Vladimir Ilych Lenin '3.5 The working class as vanguard fighter for democracy' in *What is to be done* 1902, <http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>, accessed 18 September 2007.

28 The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) was never more than an influential propaganda group with a few hundred members before it became a thoroughly Stalinist organisation, whose first loyalty was to Russia's rulers rather than the working class, in 1930. The CPA became a more substantial organisation with a few thousand members from the 1930s. To an extent, the CPA remained an organisational accumulator until the start of the 1980s, despite its Stalinist and then reformist politics. Its membership included many movement activists and trade union militants. It recruited new people to its ranks (although its membership fluctuated), coordinating their activity and provided them with political direction. Stuart MacIntyre *The reds: the Communist Party of Australia from origins to illegality* Allen & Unwin, St Leonards 1999, pp. 149-150, 164, 179. For the evolution of the CPA also see O'Lincoln *Into the mainstream*.

29 Mick Armstrong *From little things big things grow: strategies for building revolutionary socialist organisations* Socialist Alternative, Melbourne 2007.